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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - Somaliland Parliament Disrupted Amid Increased Tension

REF: A) Nairobi 1729 B) Addis Ababa 2092

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Summary  
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11. (SBU) On August 29, on orders from the Minister of Interior, police took control of the parliament building in Hargeisa. The police commander on the scene dismissed the usual security at the parliament and the Speaker's bodyguards. The police then escorted into parliament six MPs from the president's UDUB party who had been suspended days before by parliament's disciplinary committee for disrupting the August 24 session and destroying public property. The Speaker publicly called the police presence an illegal interference with the activities of the House of Representatives. The Minister of Interior countered that the actions were in the name of public safety. Again on August 30, police were dispatched into key areas and fired into the air to disburse crowds in front of the parliament building. There were no injuries, but police arrested several persons. As the tension is mounting among key stakeholders, the political impasse remains at a deadlock. International and internal mediation efforts are ongoing, but are making little headway. End Summary.

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Police Escort Renegade Legislators  
Into Parliament  
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12. (SBU) With the backdrop of Somaliland's ongoing political crisis (ref A), tensions flared as lawmakers and police confronted each other at the House of Representatives. On August 24, six MPs from the ruling UDUB party disrupted parliamentary debate by breaking chairs, disabling the amplification system, and instigating a scuffle with the House leadership. In a September 1 conversation, Speaker of Parliament Abdirahman Abdilahi "Irro" told us that he suspected the MPs caused the disturbance to prevent the tabling of a motion of impeachment against President Riyale. Parliament's Standing and Discipline Committee placed the MPs under disciplinary action and suspended them from attending three legislative sessions. On August 28, the suspended MPs released public statements that they would not accept any disciplinary action and that they would continue to attend parliamentary sessions. They requested security support from the police and government.

13. (SBU) On August 29, on orders from the Minister of Interior, police units led by Police Commander Gen. Mohamed Saqadhi took control of the Parliament building in Hargeisa. The Commander dismissed the House's regular security, under the Speaker's control, and replaced them with units under the command of the Minister of

Interior. Saqaghi also dismissed the Speaker's bodyguards. The policemen escorted the six banned UDUB parliamentarians into the legislative session.

14. (SBU) The Speaker adjourned the session and reportedly told the police commander that his units' presence was an illegal interference with the activities of the House of Representatives. Commander Saqadhi replied that he was simply following orders from the Minister of Interior to escort the six MPs into the meeting hall, despite the disciplinary action against them.

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Tensions Mount in Hargeisa  
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15. (SBU) Immediately following the August 29 police intervention, the Speaker and his two deputies told the press that the elected members of parliament cannot function properly due to "interferences and harassment from the government." For his part, the Minister of Interior explained that police were protecting the parliament and preventing riots to take place. Opposition leaders publicly accused the government of destroying the legal institutions of the country and undermining national unity.

16. (SBU) On August 30, the government again deployed a large number of police on Hargeisa's main roads, at the Parliament grounds, and at presidential compound. They closed the parliament and prevented MPs from bringing their vehicles on the premises. To disperse the crowds, police fired into the air and arrested several people, including the wife of the second deputy speaker who was released after being detained for several hours. Large crowds near the

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Parliament were reported to have chanted "Down with Riyale". The disturbances cause the Guurti, or upper house, to cancel its August 30 mediation session on the political standoff.

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International Mediation Efforts Ongoing  
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17. (SBU) While the political impasse deepens and tensions mount, mediation efforts continue. The August 19-24 Ethiopian delegation reportedly made some progress, most notably encouraging dialogue and discussions with all stakeholders on the points of the non-paper it developed. Though all sides expressed to us their hope that the mediation efforts would break the impasse, Minister of State Takeda Alemu apparently failed to negotiate a breakthrough during his initial visit. Ethiopian efforts provided a point of departure (ref B), but now appear to be on hold in favor of UK leadership of international mediation, our contacts tell us. At present, both opposition parties remain firm in their opposition to the Ethiopian proposal that would allow President Riyale to remain in office in case the elections are once more postponed.

18. (SBU) While the Ethiopian mission was in Somaliland, the African Union also sent a delegation, led by Special Envoy for Somalia Nicolas Bwakira. Ambassador Bwakira met with all the key stakeholders and the Ethiopian delegation. In a statement to the press, the AU Special Envoy endorsed the Ethiopian efforts.

19. (SBU) The UK delegation, led by John Marshall, Deputy Ambassador of the UK Embassy in Addis, visited Hargeisa August 29-30. The delegation reportedly met with President Riyale, members of the National Electoral Commission (NEC), and opposition party leaders. A UK representative who accompanied Marshall told us the August 29 Riyale meeting was disappointing because he remained steadfast that the NEC could not be reconstituted. The delegation was to have a follow-up meeting the morning of August 30, but it was cancelled because Riyale was reportedly ill. Kulmiye leader Silanyo remained firm in his position that there cannot be any more extensions for Riyale. UCID leader Faisal was more flexible, suggesting that accommodation could be made for another extension provided that the four controversial NEC commissioners were removed and a date for the elections set by outside experts.

¶10. (SBU) The UK delegation also met with the NEC. The election commissioners indicated that there was a budget, but at the moment no money to move forward with elections without the voter registration. The UK planned to release a public statement and indicated that next steps will include working with the Ethiopians to suggest alternative language in a revised MOU for the stakeholders. The UK representative also indicated the importance of keeping up pressure to re-constitute the NEC.

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Concurrent Internal Mediation  
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¶11. (SBU) In addition to the international efforts, there are also several Somaliland-based mediation initiatives. The Union for Somaliland Journalists has organized a team of 25 persons including merchants, religious leaders, traditional elders, scholars, and others. This team nominated a smaller working group which met with the chairmen of the opposition parties. The committee requested a meeting with President Riyale, but he declined, citing the Ethiopian delegation's efforts.

¶12. (SBU) More successful by operating behind the scenes is a concurrent mediation effort driven by the sultans of Somaliland's major clans, who are meeting widely to solve the crisis. The Guurti also appointed an internal mediating committee consisting of 22 members to solve the crisis. The Guurti claimed that they are the only institution which has the mandate to solve problems of this magnitude and discouraged sultans or others from interfering in the country's political disputes. Thus far, the committee has not agreed on an approach and as a result of the August 30 disturbances, they have not met.

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Comment  
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¶13. (SBU) Despite multiple mediation efforts, there has been no

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real break in the political stalemate. Riyale and the UDUB party insist on yet another extension and refuse to reconstitute the NEC. Even though parliament has long demanded the NEC and the government to use the voter registration list for the presidential elections, both have refused to commit to this. We remain in touch with our international partners and with key stakeholders from all sides, including some working level Somaliland officials, though some government representatives remain reluctant to engage with us directly. Nevertheless, as the UK assumes a more prominent role in the mediation efforts, we are hopeful the President will engage with us, too.

RANNEBERGER